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Russia: Availability of fraudulent or illegally obtained identity documents (2005 - March 2007)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Russian media sources have highlighted a number of reports involving the production or use of fraudulent or illegally obtained identity documents (ITAR-TASS 13 May 2005; RIA Novosti 16 Nov. 2005; *The Moscow Times* 7 Dec. 2005). In March 2006, the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS cited Interior Ministry data as indicating that Russian police seize over 25,000 false Russian passports every year (15 Mar. 2006), a figure which could not, however, be corroborated by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On 13 May 2005, ITAR-TASS reported that the Moscow prosecutor's office had charged a police inspector with forging and selling 36 false passports over a 5 month period in 2003, but further or corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within time constraints.

In November 2005, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) detained 30 citizens using counterfeit documents to pass themselves off as FSB operatives and other government officials (RIA Novosti 16 Nov. 2005; ITAR-TASS 16 Nov. 2005). According to Sergei Ignatchenko, the head of the FSB's public relations department, such fraud is a major concern and requires stricter sanctions, since "Russia's effective legislation does not envision criminal responsibility for the use of copies of service IDs" (ibid.). According to Ignatchenko, criminals and "terrorists" often use forged FSB documents in combination with police and security service uniforms, which can be "easily purchase[d]" (RIA Novosti 16 Nov. 2005). FSB agents also discovered several Internet sites used to sell FSB identification documents; on one such site, the price asked was 6,000 roubles [approximately CAD267 (Canada 27 Feb. 2007)] (ITAR-TASS 16 Nov. 2005).

One month later, the FSB announced that it had detained more than 20 people suspected of involvement in a ring that produced fraudulent identification documents and licence plates (*The Moscow Times* 7 Dec. 2005). The ring allegedly produced documents identifying the bearer as a police officer, an aide to a State Duma deputy, or a ministerial advisor; a package containing such a document along with a fake licence plate and security passes could sell for up to USD200,000 (ibid.). According to FSB spokesperson Ignatchenko, of the 1,500 permits issued by the Interior Ministry allowing bearers to avoid cargo checks, the majority are illegally owned (ibid.).

In April 2006, ITAR-TASS reported on the detention by police of members of a criminal group which made fake passports and credit cards to purchase over USD500,000 worth of consumer goods (19 Apr. 2006).

The New York Times reported in August 2005 that the Russian government had taken measures to fight corruption, including the stiffening of penalties for crimes such as issuing fake passports (13 Aug. 2005). The Interior Ministry has reportedly opened a law enforcement Web portal with a special section on lost and stolen passports, allowing citizens to verify the identity of a person with whom he or she has business dealings (ITAR-TASS 15 Mar. 2006). According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005*, "[l]aw enforcement sources agreed that document fraud was often committed in the process of obtaining external passports and visas, but they were uncertain to what extent this involved official corruption rather than individual or organized criminal activity" (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5); the same source adds that some corrupt officials have been reported prosecuted in cases involving document fraud (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Council of Europe (COE), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

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